

Weather

Sunny today with highs in the mid to upper 80s. Complete forecast on A2.

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6 Sections

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Today

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Saturday, July 12, 1997

Frederick

The rifle

Test bullets fired from a rifle belonging to James Earl Ray had characteristics different than the slug that killed Martin Luther King Jr.

Specifications

Caliber	30.06
Capacity	4 in clip magazine plus one in chamber
Barrel length	22"
Overall length	42"
Stock and fore-end	American walnut
Average weight	7 1/2 pounds



760 "Gamemaster" pump action rifle

Ray's rifle ruled

By MATTHEW BARAKAT
News-Post Staff

While a judge in a Memphis courtroom said Friday that the bullet that killed Martin Luther King Jr. doesn't match the rifle linked to convicted assassin James Earl Ray, a Frederick man says he proved that same fact in court more than 20 years ago, but the evidence was ignored.

Harold Weisberg, 84, an author and former Senate investigator,

worked as an investigator for Ray's defense team in the early 1970s. Mr. Weisberg says they proved during a two-week evidentiary hearing that Ray could not have fired the shot that killed Dr. King.

"The butt of his rifle would have had to been in the wall of the bathroom," Mr. Weisberg said.

Jim Lesar, who was Ray's lawyer from 1970 to 1976 and is now president of the Assassination Archives Research Center in Washington, agreed.

Post

Good morning!

An idea can turn to dust or magic depending on the talent that rubs against it.

- William Bernbach

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50¢

out 20 years ago

"We put on evidence that was contradicted that the rifle could not have been fired from the rooming-house window in the manner alleged by the state of Tennessee," Mr. Lesar said. "The whole thing was absolutely ludicrous."

Despite the evidence that was presented, the judge ruled that Ray was not entitled to a trial because he pleaded guilty to the assassination in 1969, ending his right to a trial.

But now that the King family has

requested a trial and said they believe Ray, there seems to be more willingness to question inconsistencies that were overlooked in the '70s.

"The difference now is that the King family has said they want a trial," Mr. Weisberg said. "Unfortunately the King family was silent when their support would have meant the most."

Despite the revival of interest

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Ray's

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and the judge's statement today. Mr. Lesar is skeptical that Ray will be granted a trial.

"Everybody knows they don't have enough evidence to get a conviction. They didn't have it then and they certainly don't have it now. Really the only question is whether they'll do the decent thing and set him free," Mr. Lesar said. "But there should be an investigation. Somebody did it. Ray didn't do it."

Mr. Weisberg, who received and reviewed 80,000 pages of previously classified documents on the assassination under the Freedom of Information Act, said that if Ray played any role in the assassination it was done unwittingly.

"I don't think there's any question that he (Ray) was being manipulated by criminals," he said.

The Old Receiver Road resident remains angry at the actions of government agencies he said deliberately hampered a full investigation of Dr. King's death.

"You have no idea how badly every authority of government behaved," Mr. Weisberg said. "There should be a stink that shakes this country to its roots."